

Advancing Mental Health Equity and Ending Stigma in Black Communities

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Mental health equity requires ending stigma and expanding access. Mental health is essential to overall health, yet systemic inequities and stigma continue to prevent many in the Black community from receiving timely, culturally appropriate care. Black Americans are more likely to experience social determinants that contribute to mental health challenges, such as poverty, trauma, and discrimination, but less likely to have access to treatment. **The National Black Nurses Association, Inc. (NBNA), representing over 308,000 Black nurses,** urges Congress to take bold action to address mental health stigma, expand access, and invest in Black mental health professionals. Nurses are on the frontlines of healing and know that **breaking stigma is a critical step toward saving lives.**

Policy Priorities for Congressional Action

1. **Promote culturally appropriate mental health services** by increasing federal funding in community-based, culturally responsive mental health services through **HRSA, SAMHSA, and Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs).**
2. **Pass and fully fund legislation that** supports research, workforce development, and early intervention strategies targeted to high-risk youth in Black and underserved communities.
3. **Expand the mental health workforce pipeline.** This strengthens programs that recruit and retain **psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNPs),** Black psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers through **loan forgiveness, scholarships, and Title VIII nursing programs.**
4. **Require mental health parity enforcement** by strengthening enforcement of legislation that ensures equitable insurance coverage for mental health and substance use treatment.
5. **Launch national anti-stigma campaigns.** Fund public education efforts led by nurses, faith leaders, and community advocates, to challenge cultural stigma, promote mental health literacy, and normalize help-seeking behaviors in Black communities.
6. **Integrate behavioral health into primary care** by incentivizing integrated care models that embed mental health screening and services in primary care settings, including federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) and school-based health clinics.

Why This Matters

- Only **1 in 3 Black adults** who need mental health care receive it.¹
- The suicide rate among Black adolescents is **increasing faster** than other racial and ethnic groups.²
- **Cultural stigma, provider bias, and lack of access** contribute to delays in diagnosis and treatment.³
- Nurses play a vital role in **destigmatizing mental health,** providing care, and connecting patients to resources.⁴
- Integrating behavior health into primary **care improves access, reduces stigma,** enhances care coordination, and leads to better physical and mental outcomes where disease burden is high and access to mental health services is low.⁵

References

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3. American Psychiatric Association (2023). *Mental health facts for African Americans*
4. Scott, H. (2024). Role of nurses in promoting mental health awareness in the community. *Journal of Advanced Practices in Nursing, 9(6)*
5. Staab, E.M., Wan, W., Li, M., Quinn, M. T., Campbell, A., Gedeon, S., Schaefer, C. T., Laiteerapong, N. (2023). Integration of primary care and behavioral health services in Midwestern community health centers: A mixed methods study. *Family System Health, 40(2), 182-209.*